

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS  
TESTIMONY OF MICAH KANE IN SUPPORT OF SB 344

Tuesday, February 25, 2003

Aloha mai kakou Chairman Campbell, Vice-Chairman Inouye, Senator Akaka, and honorable members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs. My name is Micah Kane and I am the Director of the State of Hawaii's Department of Hawaiian Home Lands. Mahalo for this opportunity to appear before you today to testify in support of SB 344, commonly known as the Akaka bill.

The Department of Hawaiian Home Lands is the agency within our state government that administers the federal trust lands created by Congress more than 80 years ago under the Hawaiian Homes Commission Act of 1920. This act set aside more than 200,000 acres of land for use by Native Hawaiians. Currently, over 20,000 Native Hawaiians live on these lands, in more than 30 different communities, on almost every island in the state. An even larger number of qualifying Native Hawaiians remain on a waiting list – hoping for their opportunity for home ownership and land stewardship.

With me today, are Uncle Tony Sang, the Chairman of the State Council of Hawaiian Homestead Associations (SCHHA) and Ms. Robin Danner, his Vice-Chairman. These two individuals represent and work daily on behalf of real people, in real communities, and they do it very well. They are just the tip of the iceberg. There are many more Native Hawaiians who selflessly work for the betterment of our people.

My remarks today will focus on just three (3) issues. First -- where the support for this bill is coming from. Second -- the economic realities of this measure. And third -- the practical reasoning which supports the passage of this bill.

- 1- First, there is broad and deep support from Hawaiian and Non-Hawaiian communities alike, and Republican and Democrat party lines. Our entire congressional delegation supports this measure and Governor Lingle has made its passage a major objective of

her administration. It also is backed by resolutions passed by the Hawaii State Legislature, the National American Indian Housing Council, the National Congress of American Indians, and the Alaska Federation of Natives, and it has been included in the national and Hawaii platforms for the Republican and Democratic parties. Most importantly to me, the homestead communities to which I am accountable also support this measure. In short, the Akaka bill is supported by the people most directly affected by it, and also by people with no vested or common interests other than a desire to see justice done.

- 2- Second, the Akaka bill would eliminate legal problems and uncertainties that have adversely affected the Hawaii economy. These troubling and unsettled issues relate to property title, ceded land claims, and rights to natural resources. Without federal recognition of Native Hawaiians, the State of Hawaii will spend thousands of unnecessary man-hours and millions of taxpayer dollars defending and clarifying Native Hawaiian rights. Enactment of the Akaka bill would bring closure and allow our state to move forward.
- 3- Third, the Akaka bill simply completes a journey that Congress began many years ago. There are over 150 statutes passed by Congress which address the conditions and lives of Native Hawaiians. The goal has been to redress past wrongs and to empower self-help. I would humbly submit that passage of this bill rightfully extends the successes of our country's era of self-determination for its native peoples to Native Hawaiians. It would allow us to control our destiny as a native people and thus to participate more fully and more proudly as Americans.

In closing, I would like to thank Senator Inouye, Senator Akaka, and the rest of Hawaii's Congressional Delegation for their long-standing commitment to the fight for self-determination for the Hawaiian people. I would also like to acknowledge the efforts and leadership of all Hawaiian organizations, including the Office of Hawaiian Affairs, who

continue to dedicate themselves and to persevere in their work to achieve the goal of Federal Recognition.

I also want to publicly thank Governor Lingle for including so many Native Hawaiians in her administration. By doing so, she has empowered and challenged us to use our talents to improve the lives of all the people of Hawaii. We are humbled by the trust she has placed in us, and we fully recognize the responsibility that comes with the opportunity to serve others.

And finally, I thank you, the members of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, for your past and present efforts in ensuring that the profound American notions of justice, fairness, and equality are not only spoken to Native Hawaiians, but are preserved and brought to life for us. Once again, mahalo nui loa.